

THE LESSON OF YALTA

The Cost of By-Passing Democratic Process

G. F. HUDSON

ONLY nine years have passed since the Yalta conference, but already it seems an enormously long time ago. The photographs of the Big Three seated together appear today to belong to as remote a past as representations of Pharaohs on the walls of Egyptian temples or figures in the Bayeux Tapestry. It is difficult indeed now to recapture to the atmosphere of those far-off days when, as Robert Sherwood tells us in *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins*:

The mood of the American delegates, including Roosevelt and Hopkins, could be described as one of supreme exultation as they left Yalta. They were confident that their British colleagues agreed with them that this had been the most encouraging conference of all, and the immediate response of the principal spokesmen for British and American public opinion added immeasurably to their sense of satisfaction with the job that had been done.

If in 1954 there are few people who can see cause for satisfaction, and still less for

WITH our statesmen embarking upon a new period of negotiations with the USSR, American public opinion continues anxiously to review the episode of Yalta, in search of lessons to guide us in the present. G. F. HUDSON, distinguished Oxford historian and political analyst of the *London Economist*, here documents his view that the fundamental mistake the West made with Stalin—one that helped keep the Russians in Central Europe and open the gates of China to the Communists—was in abandoning democratic international relations and the Anglo-American tradition of checks-and-balances. Professor Hudson is a frequent contributor to these pages, his last previous appearance being "The Return to Wishful Thinking" in January of this year. He has written several books on Far Eastern affairs, and during the war he served in the British Foreign Office.

exultation, in what was done at Yalta, it has to be remembered that we have the advantage of hindsight and there is always force in the proverb that it is easy to be wise after the event. Certainly there are some politicians who today most loudly condemn the Yalta decisions, but were hardly conspicuous in protest at the time. On the other hand, account must also be taken of the fact that the American and British governments had at their disposal information which was not then available to the general public or even to Congressmen and Members of Parliament—information which pointed very definitely to the long-term aims of Soviet policy. The historian who would arrive at a fair estimate of the Yalta record must try to avoid being prejudiced by the experience of the years since February 1945, but he must at the same time ask how far the hopes set on Yalta were reasonable in the light of the evidence the Western statesmen then already had before their eyes.

THE case on their behalf was recently made, though not without substantial concessions to the critics, in an editorial of the *New York Times* (January 24, 1954):

Yalta was a wartime conference at which some good agreements, some bad agreements, and some indifferent agreements were made. It was a grievous error that the whole of these agreements was not public or at least communicated to the Senate. It was a grievous error to promise the Soviet Union rights that belonged to the Nationalist Government of China. But Yalta was also a prelude to the United Nations; at Yalta Russia agreed with the other conferees on free elections with secret ballot in Poland and other lands plundered by the Nazis. If Russia had honorably and honestly carried out its part of the agreements, Yalta might be remembered with reasonable satisfaction. In any case there is every reason to suppose that under the cir-

cumstances that existed in early 1945 the Senate would have ratified the Yalta understanding for what then seemed to be the supremely important purpose of getting Soviet Russia into the war against Japan.

Three points are made in this argument: first, that some of the agreements made at Yalta were harmless, or even beneficial; second, that the agreements about Poland and other East European countries were in themselves just and only went wrong because of violations by Russia; and third, that the agreement about China was justified—or would at least have been endorsed by the Senate—because of the imperative need for inducing Russia to join in the war against Japan. The first of these points cannot be taken very seriously. The charge against the Western statesmen is, to put it briefly, that they yielded to Russia the sovereign rights of two allied nations, Poland and China, without the consent of their recognized governments, thereby violating the principles on which the policy of the Western Powers was supposed to be based and facilitating the expansion of Communist power which has been the great disaster of the postwar period. In relation to this charge it is irrelevant to plead that Russia was at the same time persuaded to join the United Nations or to permit France to participate in the military occupation of Germany, just as it would be unhelpful for a man accused of murder to try to extenuate his crime by saying that on the same day that he killed his victim he also contributed generously to the funds of his local church.

Even if the various Yalta agreements are regarded as a single whole in which concessions were traded each way, it would still remain a matter for condemnation that the leaders of the Western democracies treated the sovereignties of their allies as diplomatic trading assets. If these acts are to be justified at all, it must be by showing either that the vital interests of Poland and China were somehow safeguarded, at any rate on paper, or else that their sacrifice was required by overwhelming military necessity in the struggle against Germany and Japan.

ON POLAND, Harry Hopkins has recorded, in notes of a conversation between Roosevelt, Eden, and himself as far back as March 1943, that "the President said that, after all, the big powers would have to decide what Poland should have, and that he, the President, did not intend to go to the Peace Conference and bargain with Poland or the other small states; as far as Poland is concerned, the important thing is to set it up in a way that will help maintain the peace of the world." This attitude was curiously similar to that advocated in the same month by the Soviet Ambassador, who told Hopkins that "he felt that Great Britain and the United States should decide what was to be done about Poland and 'tell them' rather than ask them."

This talk of Great Power dictation to Poland was less than two years after the promulgation of the Atlantic Charter, in which Roosevelt and Churchill had declared it to be their policy to restore sovereignty to countries that had been deprived of it by the war. Already, it seems, wartime habits had inclined the President towards a distinctly arrogant and peremptory attitude towards weaker Allied nations, which was in striking contrast to his desire to soothe and conciliate the Soviet Union. By November of 1944, three months before the Yalta conference, his views on the Polish question are thus recorded by Arthur Bliss Lane, who had an interview with him after being appointed American Ambassador to Poland:

I observed that the Soviet view of an independent Poland was quite different from our conception. The President stated that he had entire confidence in Stalin's word and he felt sure that he would not go back on it. I said that I regretted I could not agree with him, as Stalin's previous actions had shown him not to be dependable. . . . Mr. Roosevelt said that he thought Stalin's idea of having a *cordon sanitaire* in the shape of a Poland under Russian influence, as a bulwark to protect the Soviet Union . . . was understandable; Stalin himself had pointed out to the President that after World War I the Allies had formed a *cordon sanitaire* . . . to protect them from the threat of Bolshevism and now he claimed a corresponding right to protect himself from the West.

Roosevelt was apparently unable to see that there was no valid analogy between the so-called *cordon sanitaire* of the years after World War I and what Stalin was doing in Poland in the autumn of 1944. It is true that in the former period the states along the western border of the Soviet Union—Finland, the Baltic States, and Poland, which had been formed in whole or in part from the territory of the old Russian empire, together with Rumania, which had annexed Bessarabia—had an intense fear and distrust of the new Communist Russia and were regarded by conservative politicians in Western Europe as a convenient barrier against the westward expansion of Soviet power. But their governments were not imposed on them by French or British military occupation, and far from being obedient satellites, they often acted in a manner of which London and Paris strongly disapproved. Stalin, on the other hand, having invaded and seized half the territory of Poland in 1939 in alliance with Nazi Germany and deported some 10 per cent of its population to Arctic Russia, Siberia, and Central Asia, had now in 1944 placed Russian-occupied Poland under the rule of a group of Polish Communists and their stooges, while the NKVD imprisoned or executed supporters of the Polish government-in-exile which had been recognized by the United States and Britain as legally representing the Polish state ever since the joint German-Russian conquest of the country.

Roosevelt must have been well aware of this situation, but he preferred to indulge his private vision of a postwar world controlled by a benevolent directorate of Great Powers—a fancy in which he was encouraged by amateur and unofficial advisers. Warned of Stalin's ambitions of European domination, he replied: "I just have a hunch that Stalin isn't that kind of a man. Harry tells me he's not and that he doesn't want anything but security for his country. I think that if I give him everything I possibly can and ask for nothing in return, he won't try to annex anything and will work with me for a world of peace and democracy."

It is clear that if Roosevelt was thus convinced that Stalin wanted nothing but security for his country, and if he found it so "understandable" that Stalin claimed a Poland "under Russian influence" as his *cordon sanitaire*, he could have no strong objection to Soviet nomination of Polish cabinet ministers as a means of insuring this influence. Indeed, had it not been for the agitation carried on in the United States by the Polish-American Congress and a certain restiveness in Congress, it seems doubtful whether Roosevelt would have made any difficulty at all about transferring diplomatic recognition to the Lublin Committee in its original form. Certainly he did not feel himself restrained from so doing by any considerations of international law, for during the Yalta conference, according to Stettinius, who is not a hostile witness, he declared that "he did not attach much importance to the continuity or legality of any Polish Government, since he felt that for some years there had been in reality no Polish Government." In comment on this astonishing statement it is only necessary to point out that since September 1939 President Roosevelt's administration had concluded several formally signed treaties with the government which he claimed at Yalta had never really existed.

CHURCHILL's attitude to Poland was widely different from Roosevelt's, and yet in practice it converged with his towards the same outcome of surrender to Russian demands. Where Roosevelt saw Stalin as a just and good man who only wanted security for his country, Churchill saw him as an irresistible conqueror of Eastern Europe and held that only by abject submission to his demands could the Poles expect to retain even a fraction of their independence. In Moscow, in October 1944, he told Romer, the Foreign Minister of the Polish government-in-exile, that "Poland is threatened with virtual extinction and would be effaced as a nation" unless the Polish government agreed forthwith to cede to the Soviet Union nearly a half of Poland's pre-war territory and amalgamate with the Lublin Committee, the

latter's terms for the coalition being that the Communists should have three-quarters of the Cabinet seats, including control of the army and police.

Churchill's attitude was a strictly "realist" one; the Poles were faced with overwhelming force, and nobody was in a position to help them, so they must submit in the hope of obtaining some mitigation of the conqueror's terms. But Churchill's pressure on the Polish government to capitulate to Russia was not inspired by any illusions about Communism; on the contrary, Churchill was very much aware of the Communist menace in Europe at a time when the American government was totally blind to it, and he did not hesitate to oppose it wherever he had military force available. In November 1944 British troops were used to turn back Communist armed bands marching on Brussels for a *coup d'état* (similar Communist plans in France having been forestalled by the action of General de Gaulle); in Athens in December, British opposition to seizure of power by the Greek Communists led to severe and prolonged fighting.

There was no support from Washington for these anti-Communist moves; the British intervention in Greece evoked a storm of criticism in the American press and the official attitude was adverse to it. In spite of the lack of American cooperation, Churchill succeeded in preventing Communist domination of Greece—which would have involved the encirclement and subjugation of Turkey as well—but he was only able to obtain a free hand in Greece as far as Russia was concerned by an agreement recognizing similar Russian rights of temporary administration in Rumania and Bulgaria. Although Poland was not specifically included in this demarcation of zones of influence, it was implied that the Russians could arrange matters as they pleased where they had actual military occupation, and thereafter it was difficult to reassert any general principles applicable to all European countries. In saving Greece, Churchill had in effect written off the rest of Eastern Europe.

The memoirs of Stettinius bear witness to

the pessimism of Churchill just before the Yalta conference. Of his meeting with Churchill at Malta on the way to the Crimea, Stettinius writes:

During the course of conversation Churchill expressed utter dismay at the outlook of the world. He said that there were probably more units of suffering among humanity as of this hour, while we were meeting, than ever before in history. As he looked out on the world, he added, it was one of sorrow and bloodshed. It was his opinion that future peace, stability, and progress depended on Great Britain and the United States remaining in close harmony at all times.

The pessimism of Churchill, however, worked against the cause of Polish independence no less than the optimism of Roosevelt did. The only difference was that, whereas Roosevelt could see no harm in a Soviet *cordon sanitaire* covering Eastern Europe, Churchill regarded it as an evil which could not be prevented. Moreover, his resolve not to get out of step with America if he could avoid it inclined him to give way on issues combining Roosevelt and Stalin against him.

SHORTLY before the Yalta meeting, and in spite of a personal appeal from Roosevelt not to take such action before the conference, Stalin had formally recognized the Communist-controlled Lublin Committee as the *de jure* government of Poland. As both the United States and Britain still recognized the Polish government-in-exile in London—which had the allegiance of all the Polish armed forces operating in Western Europe—the Soviet move was a provocative challenge to them and they could not simply transfer recognition to the puppet regime without appearing to submit to Soviet pressure. There was enough sympathy and support for Poland both in America and in Britain to make it politically risky for the American and British governments to accept the Russian *fait accompli* in Poland unless they could present to their own peoples some appearance of having reached a compromise on the subject. They must be able plausibly to claim that they had not recognized the Lublin

Committee, but had got Russia to agree to a new coalition government.

This, however, was only a matter of show for domestic consumption in America and Britain. The deeper political issue was whether the American and British leaders could in fact do anything to alter the situation created by Russian policy and restore the national independence of Poland. They had one high card to play—their power to grant or withhold recognition. Since Poland was under Russian military occupation, they could not directly intervene there, but they could declare that they would not transfer diplomatic recognition from the Polish government-in-exile to any newly created Polish authority until free elections had been held in Poland to ascertain the wishes of the Polish people.

Such a stand would have put Stalin in a dilemma, for he would either have to allow free elections—which, as he well knew, would give his puppets only a small minority of the votes cast—or dispense indefinitely with Western recognition for the regime he had set up in Poland. That he attached importance to Western recognition, in spite of his own monopoly of force in Poland, was shown by the intensity of the diplomatic pressure he brought to bear on the Western statesmen to accord it.

His armies had overrun vast areas of Eastern Europe outside the pre-war boundaries of the Soviet Union and were followed by the terrorist detachments of the NKVD; everywhere they had the aid of groups of local Communists with a miscellaneous following of dupes, opportunists, and adventurers. But they were faced with the massive hostility of popular feeling which relied on the moral support of the Western Allies against Russian domination and hoped for better times when the war was over. To break the passive resistance of the conquered peoples, to reduce them to apathy and despair, and to turn their sentiments against the West, Stalin needed Western recognition of his puppet governments, and particularly the abandonment of that unsubdued Polish national leadership which had directed the

heroic resistance of Poland to Nazi conquest ever since the beginning of the war.

IF ROOSEVELT and Churchill had seriously hoped or intended to restore the independence of Poland, they would have made the transfer of diplomatic recognition to a new Polish government conditional on the actual holding of free elections in Poland, not on a mere promise to hold them. Instead they agreed, in a document which made no mention of the Polish government with which they were still in diplomatic relations, that "the Provisional Government which is now functioning in Poland (i.e. the Lublin Committee) should be recognized on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad"; that this "reorganized" government "shall be pledged to the holding of free and unfettered elections as soon as possible on the basis of universal suffrage and secret ballot"; and that the government thus pledged should be recognized forthwith by the three Great Powers without waiting for the elections to be held. The government which after long negotiations was eventually formed and recognized by America and Britain as fulfilling the terms of the Yalta agreement kept a majority of the cabinet seats for ex-members of the Lublin Committee and retained the key ministries of Public Security and Defense—with control of the police and army respectively—in Communist hands, while the Soviet citizen Bierut was left as head of the Polish state.

The elections which were to have been held "as soon as possible" were not held until January 1947, and then they were rigged by the Communists with every conceivable device of violence, intimidation, and fraud. By that time, however, the Polish Communist regime had enjoyed the fruits of *de jure* recognition for a year and a half, and the shameless violation of the pledge on condition of which it had originally been recognized did not cause either the American or the British government to withdraw its ambassador from Warsaw.

It must be emphasized that the Big Three

at Yalta did not guarantee free elections in Poland or undertake any responsibility for supervising them; they only required a pledge of free elections from the Polish Communists. In view of the violence and terror which then already prevailed in Poland, it is incredible that any Western statesman or diplomat could seriously have believed that such a pledge was of any value without some machinery for supervision to which Russia would be legally committed. But Russia was not committed to anything. The Polish Communists alone gave the pledge and they alone broke it; the Big Three bore no formal responsibility in the matter.

THE agreement on Poland and the effect subsequently given to it deprived of all significance the high-sounding generalizations of the "Declaration on Liberated Europe" which was also signed at Yalta. The principles enunciated in this declaration were admirable, but nobody in Eastern Europe could expect that they would be applied otherwise than according to the precedent of what had been done in Poland. If the Western Powers had accepted the accomplished fact of a Soviet puppet regime in Poland without insisting on previous elections or on more than an ineffective minority representation for non-Communist parties in the government, what reason was there to anticipate that they could or would do more for Rumania or Hungary or Czechoslovakia or Bulgaria? The Yalta decisions necessarily broke the back of opposition to Communist rule, not only in Poland, but in every country that had been or was about to be overrun by Russian armies.

What, then, can be urged in justification of the agreement? Why were the Western Powers in such a hurry to recognize a new Polish government before elections could be held? It is sometimes argued that, with the war against Hitler still unfinished, the Western Allies could not afford to quarrel with Stalin. But neither could he afford to quarrel with them. He could not simply withdraw from the war, because unless he got his army into Germany, he could not take the war

booty and reparations which were to be the spoils of victory. The Western Allies were in sufficient strength on the Rhine to go to Berlin without him if necessary. As far as Europe was concerned, the Big Three could hardly avoid finishing the war together, whatever their diplomatic differences. But Roosevelt may have felt that nothing must be done to annoy Stalin lest it cause him to refuse to join in the war against Japan. If that was the explanation, Poland must be added to the concessions made at Yalta at the expense of China specifically, as the price for Russian aid in the Pacific war.

THE section of the Yalta agreement relating to Manchuria has been the most widely criticized of all the Yalta decisions. Like the agreement on Poland, it was a deal between the Big Three to the detriment of a weaker Allied nation and without its consent. But it differed from the Polish "solution" in two important respects. In the first place, whereas Poland was already under Russian occupation, so that the only question was whether an accomplished fact could be altered, the concessions of Chinese sovereign rights to Russia referred to the future and were promised to Russia as a reward for prospective entry into the Pacific war. Second, while in all the negotiations on European questions both Roosevelt and Churchill took part, together with their respective Foreign Ministers, Roosevelt negotiated the agreement for Russia's entry into the Pacific war not only without consulting Churchill (who was only invited to sign it after it had been concluded), but also without the participation of his own Secretary of State.

The exclusion of Stettinius from this transaction is indeed the most extraordinary feature of the whole Yalta conference. The excuse was that the agreement for Russia's entry into the war was purely a military matter in which the State Department was not concerned; Stettinius himself in his memoirs, whether out of loyalty to Roosevelt or to cover up his own humiliation, accepts this version of the matter.

But a treaty involving extensive postwar

territorial changes and transfers of sovereign rights is obviously the proper concern of a country's diplomats, not merely of its soldiers.

Moreover, Hopkins and Harriman, who were not military men, were brought into the discussions, though Stettinius and his team of advisers from the State Department were kept out of them. Roosevelt's failure to call on them for information and advice about the extremely complex Far Eastern problems with which he had to deal is all the more strange because he had previously refrained from reading the memoranda which the State Department had prepared for his perusal on the journey to the conference. Byrnes relates in *Speaking Frankly*:

... not until the day before we landed at Malta did I learn that we had on board a very complete file of studies and recommendations prepared by the State Department. I asked the President if the Department had given him any material and he advised me it was all in the custody of Lieutenant William M. Rigdon. Later, when I saw some of these splendid studies, I greatly regretted they had not been considered on board ship. I am sure the failure to study them while en route was due to the President's illness. And I am sure that only President Roosevelt, with his intimate knowledge of the problems, could have handled the situation so well with so little preparation.

Roosevelt's own knowledge of the problems, however, appears not to have been as intimate as Byrnes would have us believe. The agreement on Manchuria stated that "the former rights of Russia violated by the treacherous attack of Japan in 1904 shall be restored," and afterwards, in verbal justification of the pact, Roosevelt claimed that the Russians were not getting anything new from China but only recovering what the Japanese had taken from them. This indicates that he was unaware that the original leases to Russia of Port Arthur, Dairen, and the South Manchurian Railway had expired twenty years previously and had only been renewed in favor of Japan as a result of the Japanese "Twenty-one Demands" of 1915, while the Russian rights in the Chinese Eastern Railways, as revised by the Sino-Soviet treaty of 1924, had been voluntarily sold by Russia to

Japan over China's vehement protest in 1935.

These were historical facts not likely to be known to anyone who was not a specialist in Far Eastern affairs, and a President of the United States could not be expected to discover them by intuition, but if he had been willing to avail himself of the services of the State Department—which kept files and archives for recording such facts—he would have been correctly informed about the past history of the properties which he so lightly made over to Stalin at China's expense. He would have been informed also that these leased territories and railways, whether held by Russia or Japan, had prevented the proper exercise of Chinese sovereignty in Manchuria for half a century, and that at best he was perpetuating what had hitherto proved to be the most dangerous and intractable source of conflict in Far Eastern affairs.

THERE can be little doubt that Roosevelt avoided consulting Stettinius about this deal for the same reason that he avoided consulting Churchill or Chiang Kai-shek—because he anticipated that they would object. He did not want to read State Department memoranda because they might not fit in with his intentions. Stalin's terms for entering the Pacific war had already been communicated to Roosevelt before Yalta, and he seems to have made up his mind to grant them without giving his official advisers a chance to discuss them—especially in view of the known opinions of Under Secretary Grew, who had been for ten years Ambassador to Japan and had a great knowledge of Far Eastern problems.

It does not follow, however, that because Roosevelt did not consult the State Department, he did not consult anybody. He had his own executive assistants at the White House, and the one of them specially in charge of Far Eastern affairs was Lauchlin Currie. Currie was mentioned as a fellow-traveler closely connected with the American Communist underground in the list of names given by Whittaker Chambers to Assistant Secretary Adolph Berle in 1940, and was named as a former member of a Soviet spy

ring in the recently published FBI report on Communist espionage which was sent to President Truman at the end of 1945. The McCarran Committee also heard considerable testimony about the political activities which Currie is alleged to have carried on in relation to Far Eastern affairs without the knowledge or consent of the State Department. It may be inferred that, if Roosevelt ever asked his advice on what should be conceded to Russia in Manchuria, the advice given would probably not have been to the disadvantage of the Soviet Union.

The stock defense of the Yalta agreement on Manchuria is that the staffs had told Roosevelt that Russia must be brought into the war in order to minimize the American casualties which would be incurred in an invasion of the Japanese homeland. But it was for the President to review this military advice in the light of the basic objectives of American foreign policy. Who was sacrificing American lives and for what end? If Stalin had demanded Alaska as his price for entering the war, most Americans would undoubtedly have considered that it would be better to have a negotiated peace with Japan than buy Russian entry into the war at such a cost.

The surrender of China's sovereign rights was not so different a case, for the United States had in fact got involved in war with Japan precisely because of a policy of opposition to Japanese domination over China, and it was a contradiction of this policy to promote a new domination over China in order to destroy the old one. When Stalin had stated his terms, the question which should have been considered was whether it was possible to have a satisfactory peace with Japan without bringing in Russia at all. In February 1945 Japan was already in fact even more thoroughly defeated than Germany, for the Japanese empire depended entirely on sea communications, and Japanese sea-power had been irretrievably smashed by the battle of the Leyte Gulf in October 1944. According to the testimony of General Bonner Fellers, General MacArthur had already

before the Yalta conference communicated to Roosevelt unofficial Japanese peace overtures amounting to acceptance of unconditional surrender but for the reservation that the Japanese monarchy should be preserved (as in the end it was).

If Japan early in 1945 had been encouraged to get out of the war in the way Italy had been, the Japanese would have had to hand over Manchuria, together with other occupied territories in China, directly to the Chinese National Government; Russia would then have had no pretext for invading Manchuria (unless Moscow were to launch an open war of aggression against China), the Chinese Communists would not have been allowed to enter Manchuria and take over the arms stocks of the Japanese army, and it is unlikely that China would be today a Communist country.

THE main source of the tragedy of Yalta was an obsession in Roosevelt's mind with the idea of Big Three unity, combined with an increasing disregard of the rights of weaker nations. The Roosevelt of Yalta was no longer the man who had drafted the Atlantic Charter. During the last two years of his life he fell more and more under the spell of his vision of a world governed arbitrarily for its good by a conclave of three men. In this trend of his thinking there was probably a subtle intoxication of personal power, for the international stage enabled him to gratify that latent appetite for autocracy which he could never indulge in the domestic politics of America.

But it was necessarily Russia, and not the Western Powers, that gained by Big Three dictatorship, for it implied principles of an authoritarian, and not of a democratic, order. The democracies can never play the totalitarian game unless they themselves become totalitarian; their interest as democracies lies in a world of independent and freely associated nations large and small. American and British policies over the last few years indicate that this lesson has made an impression. But it cannot be learned too thoroughly.